

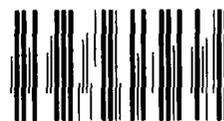
**GAO**

United States General Accounting Office 130408  
Report to the Chairman, Committee on  
Armed Services  
House of Representatives

June 1986

# VEHICLES

## Law Authorizing Shipment of Service Members' Vehicles Needs Revision



130408

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United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-214996

June 11, 1986

The Honorable Les Aspin  
Chairman, Committee on Armed Services  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr Chairman:

Under current law, Department of Defense (DOD) service members are entitled to the movement of a privately owned vehicle (POV) at government expense when they are required to make a permanent change of station or when the home port of the vessel to which they are assigned is changed. The Joint Military Travel Regulations restrict this entitlement to members ordered to make a permanent change of station to, from, or between places outside the United States. Except in the case of home port changes, the regulations do not provide for the transportation of POVs at government expense within the continental United States (CONUS). Although members are entitled to monetary allowances when driving their POVs to new duty stations in CONUS, such allowances are only in lieu of commercial transportation for the member and/or his family.

As you requested, we reviewed the shipment of service members' POVs to determine if current legislative requirements adversely affect the efficient and economical movement of these vehicles. We found that the existing law imposes two restrictions that result in excess costs to the government and other problems. These restrictions are (1) the major portion of POV shipments must be on ocean vessels and (2) the shipment of POVs is only authorized between "customary ports."

We estimate that during fiscal year 1985 these restrictions resulted in DOD incurring over \$3.1 million in additional transportation costs. The restrictions also increased costs for mileage reimbursement to members and delayed the shipment and delivery of vehicles by up to 4 months

In addition, DOD paid about \$10.2 million in travel time for service members stationed in Germany to deliver or pick up their POVs or about \$4.8 million more than if members were permitted to deliver or pick up their vehicles at a location closer to their duty stations. Of course, any reduction in costs for leave or mileage paid for service members to deliver or pick up their POVs if the legislative restrictions were lifted would be offset, to some extent, by the cost to transport those POVs overland.

Our initial review efforts focused on the shipment of POVs incident to home port changes. We later expanded our scope to include POV shipments occurring with other types of transfers since DOD officials informed us that these other moves illustrated some of the major problems caused by the current legislative restrictions and also resulted in excess costs, adversely affected service members' morale, and created traffic management problems. To examine these problems, we analyzed the transportation of POVs when shipped

- between the continental United States and Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico;
- as a result of a vessel's home port change,
- through the port of Bremerhaven, Federal Republic of Germany; and
- as a result of unit moves.

Details of our findings are included in appendix I

Recognizing that the current law governing the transportation of service members' POVs does not always permit the movement of vehicles consistent with good traffic management practices, in 1985 you introduced legislation in the House of Representatives to amend the law to permit overland shipment of service members' POVs. Although this amendment was not adopted, we believe the need for revising the legislation still exists.

We, therefore, recommend that efforts again be made to amend the current law to permit the overland movement of members' POVs when it is the most efficient and economical means of transportation. Such change would require only minor revisions to the existing law and would follow the amendment language proposed by the House in 1985, but should also delete the requirement that vehicles only be shipped between customary ports.

As you requested, we did not obtain official agency comments on this report. Unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we will not

make any further distribution of this report until 30 days after its issue date. At that time, we will make copies available to other interested parties.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Frank C. Conahan".

Frank C. Conahan  
Director

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## Abbreviations

POV	privately owned vehicles
DOD	Department of Defense
MSC	Military Sealift Command
MTMC	Military Traffic Management Command
COHORT	Cohesion, Operational Readiness and Training
CONUS	continental United States



# Privately Owned Vehicles—Legislation Authorizing Transportation Needs Revising

Current law (10 U.S.C. 2634) provides that service members are entitled to the movement of a privately owned vehicle (POV) at government expense when they are required to make a permanent change of station or when the home port of the vessel to which they are assigned is changed. The Joint Military Travel Regulations restrict this entitlement to members ordered to make a permanent change of station to, from, or between places outside the United States, except in the case of home port changes.

Under the enabling legislation, a service member's POV must be shipped primarily on an ocean vessel and such shipment is authorized only between customary ports. A portion of the shipment may be overland, but only if it does not exceed the cost of ocean transportation and if more than 50 percent of the shipping distance will still be accomplished by a vessel. A customary port is defined as "one which is closest or most convenient to the member's duty station from or to which ocean transportation, either breakbulk or container, is available." Both of these restrictions have the effect of limiting overland POV shipments (truck or rail).

During the late 1940's, POV shipments were authorized only in government-owned or controlled vessels, but over the years the law has been amended, in part, to assist the U.S.-flag common carrier fleet. However, since 1965, when the current law was amended to combine a number of other statutes dealing with the shipment of POVs, the fleet has declined and only limited U.S.-flag intercoastal service is now available.

Arranging the transportation of POVs between ocean ports is the responsibility of the Military Traffic Management Command (MTMC), DOD's traffic manager, while the delivery or the pick up of vehicles at ports is the service members' responsibility. Members are reimbursed for one-way mileage from their duty stations to the ports (or from the port to duty stations) at the rate of \$.16 per mile and are allowed 1 day of travel time for each 300 miles of driving. In addition, if the travel is concurrent with a change of station, members are entitled to a per diem allowance of about \$46 to \$50 for travel between their duty stations and the ports.

In fiscal year 1985, MTMC shipped about 125,000 POVs worldwide at a cost of about \$127 million. DOD officials told us that they have no information or estimates on the amount of money members received for mileage or for per diem, or the cost of time service members were away from their duty stations to deliver and pick up their POVs from ports.

## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Chairman of the House Committee on Armed Services asked us to evaluate DOD's shipment of POVs incident to home port changes to determine if current legislative and regulatory requirements are adversely affecting the efficient and economical shipment of such vehicles. With the agreement of committee staff, we expanded our scope to include POV shipments occurring with other types of transfers because DOD officials said these moves result in excess costs, adversely affect service members' morale, and create traffic management problems.

To develop information on POV shipments, we met with DOD and service officials in Washington, D.C., Europe, and California. We also met with a number of DOD personnel who were involved in the day-to-day shipment of service members' POVs. Among those contacted were officials in the

- Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower, Installations & Logistics (the policymaking office for DOD in this matter);
- Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowance Committee (the implementing office for DOD policy relative to vehicle shipments);
- Headquarters, Military Traffic Management Command;
- Headquarters, Military Sealift Command;
- Naval Supply Systems Command, Department of the Navy;
- Western Area Military Traffic Management Command;
- Headquarters, United States European Command;
- Headquarters, United States Army, Europe;
- Headquarters, United States Air Force, Europe;
- Military Traffic Management Command, Bremerhaven, Federal Republic of Germany; and
- Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Logistics, Department of the Army.

We reviewed the statutes and regulations governing POV shipments, legislative hearings concerning DOD's shipment of service members' vehicles, and Comptroller General decisions regarding this subject.

Our review was made from July 1985 through March 1986 and was based on an analysis of about 50,000 POV shipments occurring during the latter part of 1984 through September 1985. Information on the volume and related costs of POV shipments was furnished by the Naval Supply System Command, MTMC, and transportation officials at the installations we contacted. In those instances when we could not identify the mileage and travel time to deliver or pick up POVs, we estimated the costs based on the Joint Travel Regulations and on personnel cost information DOD provided. Some information used in this report was obtained from DOD

data processing systems. Although we did not review the adequacy of these systems, we verified, when possible, the information used in this report.

Our work was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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## Legislative Restrictions Resulted in Excess Costs and Other Problems

Legislative restrictions on overland POV shipments have resulted in excess costs to the government and other problems. We estimate that because of these restrictions the government incurred over \$3.1 million in excess transportation costs. The restrictions also increased costs for mileage reimbursement, per diem, and service members' out-of-pocket expenses; delayed shipment and delivery of vehicles by up to 4 months; and imposed hardships on service members and their families.

In addition, DOD paid about \$4.8 million more in travel time for service members stationed in Germany to deliver or pick up their POVs than would have been paid if the members had been permitted to use a POV processing location closer to their duty stations. Of course, any reduction in costs for leave or mileage paid for service members to deliver or pick up their POVs would be offset, to some extent, by the cost to transport those POVs overland.

At the time of our review, DOD was planning to recommend to the Congress changes in the POV legislation. Specifically, DOD wants the legislation amended (1) to permit shipment of POVs in Germany between a customary ocean port and an inland POV processing point in close proximity to the largest concentration of DOD personnel and (2) in the case of certain unit moves, to permit overland movement of POVs between duty stations and ports, when deemed to be in the best interest of the government, for members assigned to and from overseas areas

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## Situations Where Problems Occur

There are a number of situations where limiting POV shipments primarily to ocean vessels and between customary ports resulted in excess costs and transportation difficulties. To identify these problems, we analyzed the transportation of POVs when shipped

- between CONUS and Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico;
- as a result of the home port change of a vessel;
- to and from Germany; and
- as a result of certain unit moves.

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## Shipments Between CONUS and Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico

POVs could be shipped between CONUS and Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico at considerable cost savings and with improved efficiency if limits on overland shipment were removed. Had overland movement been unrestricted, DOD could have saved an estimated \$3.1 million in fiscal year 1985 for the shipment of about 3,000 POVs, an average savings of about \$1,000 for each vehicle. In addition, DOD could have significantly decreased transit time, in some cases by up to 4 months, thus reducing the period service members were without their vehicles.

## Alaska Shipments

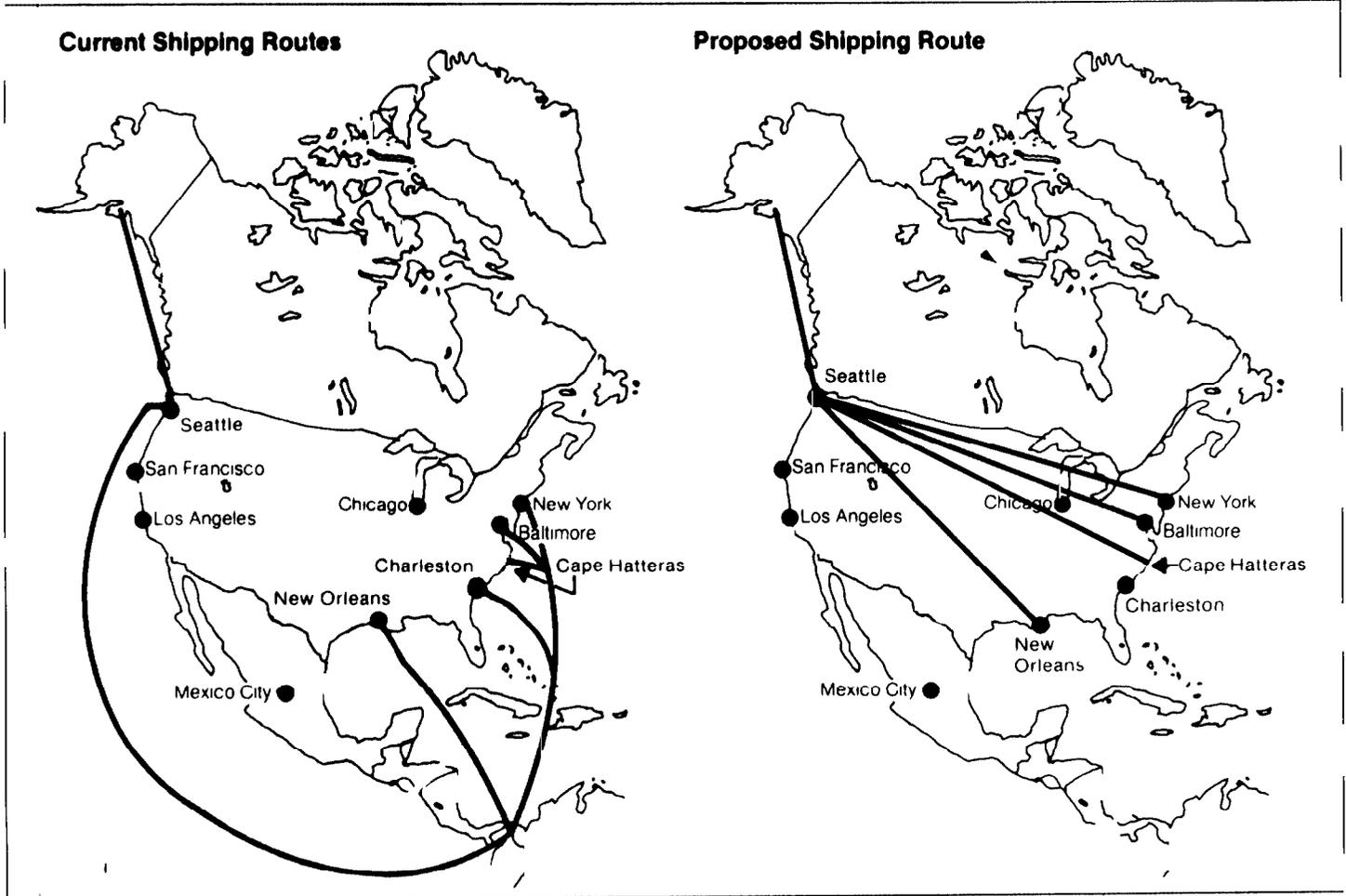
Service members transferred from Alaska to duty stations near the East Coast must have their POVs shipped by ocean vessels to Seattle, then taken by truck to Oakland, and finally shipped by ocean carriers through the Panama Canal to ports on the East Coast. DOD officials estimate that 524 POVs were transported from Alaska to the East Coast in 1985 at costs ranging from \$2,000 to \$3,000 per vehicle. Had the law permitted unlimited overland movement, DOD could have shipped these POVs from Seattle to the East Coast by motor car carriers and saved \$624,000.

For vehicles shipped to Alaska, DOD has designated Seattle as the customary port for POV shipments. As a result, service members are usually required to drive their cars to Seattle for shipment to Alaska. However, DOD officials told us that service members are granted permission to ship POVs from East Coast ports if driving to Seattle would create difficulties, as when a spouse would be required to travel alone with young children.

MTMC records indicate that over 230 vehicles were shipped from the East Coast to Alaska in fiscal year 1985. The cost to ship these vehicles through the Panama Canal was \$90,000 more than had the vehicles been moved by car carriers from the East Coast to Seattle and then by ocean vessels to Alaska. Also, DOD officials estimated that ocean shipment from East Coast ports delayed delivery of the vehicles to service members by 2 to 4 months.

Figure I.1 compares the current shipping route with the proposed overland route on shipments between Alaska and the East Coast.

Figure I.1: Alaska/East Coast Shipments



Hawaii Shipments

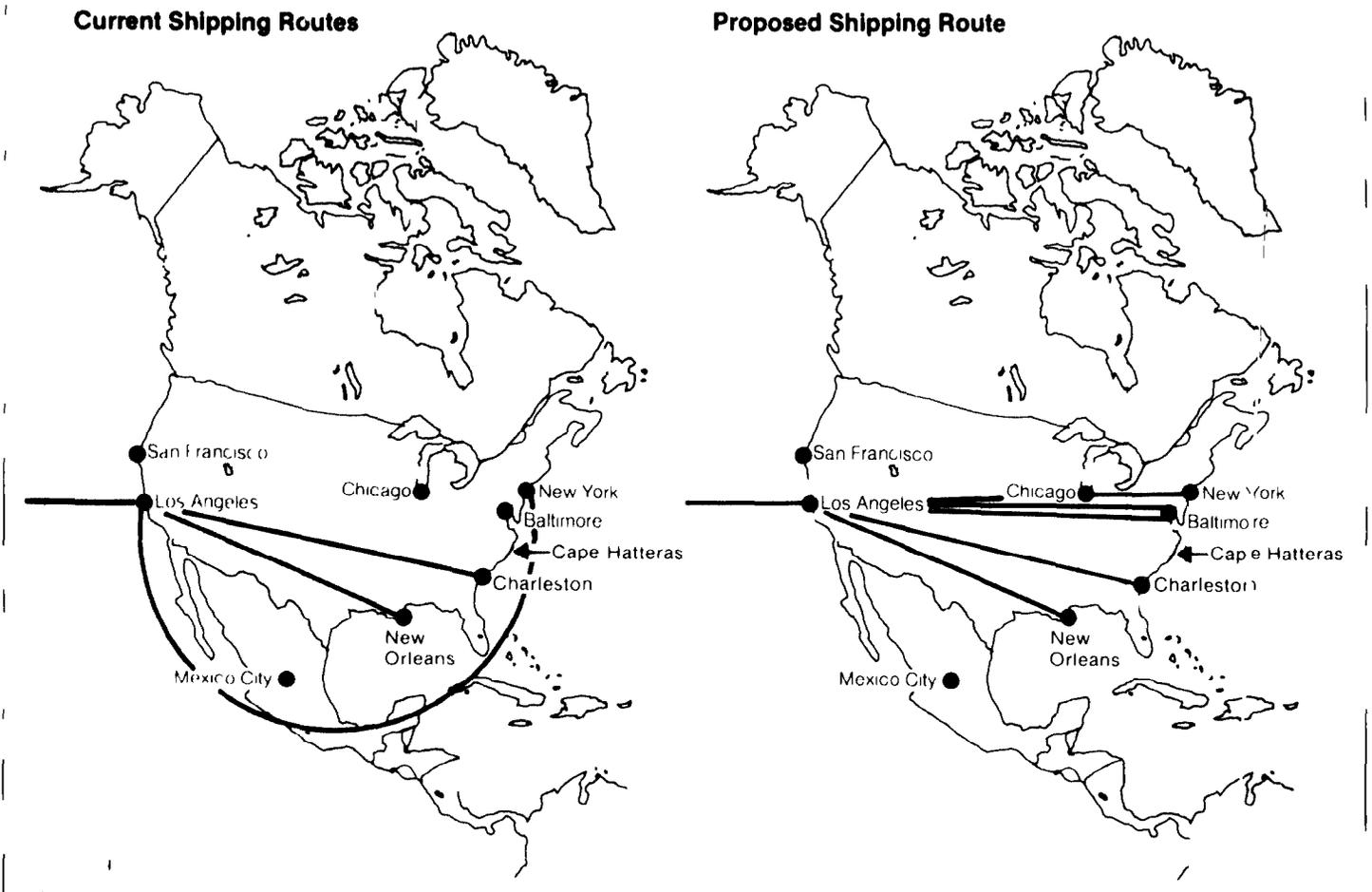
Shipments between the East Coast and Hawaii are also affected by the restrictions on the overland movement of POVs. For POV shipments from Hawaii to installations south of Cape Hatteras, located off the North Carolina coast, DOD can use truck or rail service between the East and West Coasts because the distance overland is less than 50 percent of the total distance the POVs are transported. For example, POVs moved from Charleston to Hawaii are moved overland to Long Beach and then shipped to Hawaii. Similarly, POVs returning from Hawaii to Charleston are shipped to Long Beach and then moved overland to the East Coast.

In contrast, DOD cannot ship POVs overland between Hawaii and ports north of Cape Hatteras, such as Bayonne, New Jersey, and Norfolk, Virginia, because the distance overland is more than 50 percent of the total shipment distance. Consequently, POVs are shipped between the northern East Coast ports and Hawaii through the Panama Canal.

If overland movement were unrestricted, DOD could truck the vehicles between the East and West Coasts, saving \$1,900 to \$2,400 per car and reducing transit time by roughly a month. DOD shipped 728 vehicles from East Coast ports north of Cape Hatteras to Hawaii in fiscal year 1985, representing approximately \$1.5 million in excess costs. DOD also shipped about 1,400 vehicles from Hawaii to ports north of Cape Hatteras in fiscal year 1985 at an additional cost of about \$150 to \$950 per vehicle, representing approximately \$720,000 in excess costs.

Figure 1.2 shows the route required under current legislation and the proposed route if overland shipping were permitted between Hawaii and the East Coast.

Figure I.2: Hawaii/East Coast Shipments



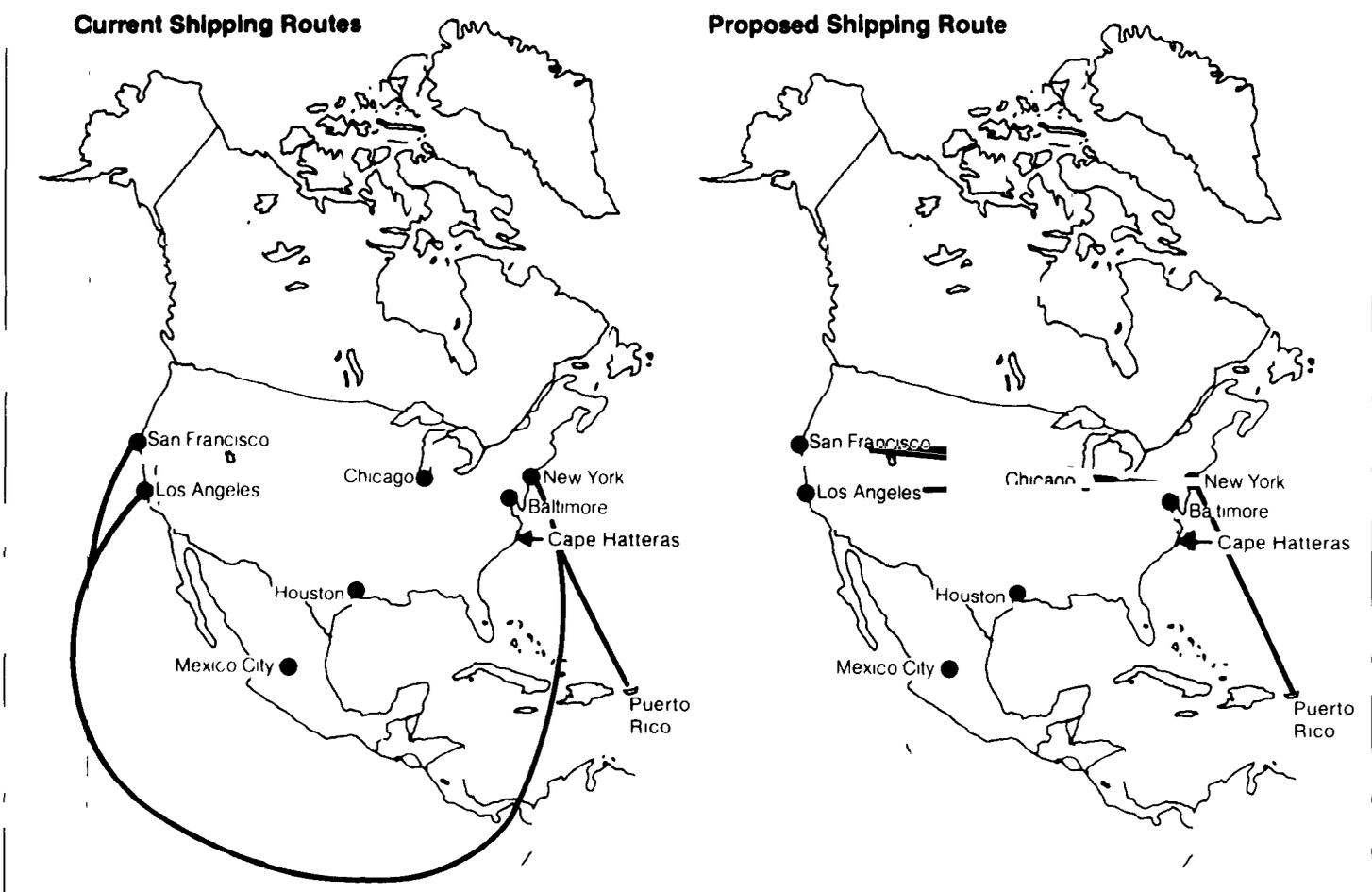
**Puerto Rico Shipments**

Restrictions on overland shipments of POVs require MTMC to move vehicles between the West Coast and Puerto Rico by shipping them to New York through the Panama Canal and then from New York to Puerto Rico. According to MTMC officials, carriers do not provide direct ocean shipping between the West Coast and Puerto Rico, and MTMC cannot move POVs overland between the West Coast and East or Gulf Coast ports because the overland portion would exceed the 50 percent restriction.

We compared the cost of using the current shipping route to the cost of shipping vehicles overland to New York and then to Puerto Rico. We estimate that transportation costs could be reduced by \$870 per vehicle and that transit time could be reduced by 20 days if POVs were shipped overland. According to MTMC records, about 180 vehicles were shipped between the West Coast and Puerto Rico in fiscal year 1985, representing approximately \$156,000 in potential cost savings.

Figure I.3 shows the ocean route in contrast to the proposed overland route on shipments between the West Coast and Puerto Rico.

Figure I.3: Puerto Rico/West Coast Shipments



**Shipments Between Home Ports**

The movement of service members' POVs by ocean vessels as a result of a home port change is more expensive than overland shipment and is often difficult to arrange because of the lack of domestic port-to-port ocean service.

From July 1, 1984, to June 30, 1985, the Navy transferred 81 ships and about 30,000 crew members between home ports in CONUS. The Navy provided us data on the transportation of POVs for 38 of these home port changes. In eight of these 38 changes, some of the vehicles had to be moved aboard Military Sealift Command (MSC) vessels or commercial vessels. If these vehicles had been moved overland, the government would have saved about \$57,000 (see table I.1) in transportation costs and an undetermined amount for mileage reimbursement, leave time, and per diem.

**Table I.1: Comparison of Shipment Costs**

Port Change		POVs moved	Mode	Ocean cost	Land cost	Savings
From	To					
Groton, CT	Bangor, WA	6	MSC	\$ 8,820	\$ 7,248	\$ 1,572
San Diego, CA	Bremerton, WA	6	MSC	5,147	3,198	1,949
Charleston, SC	Portsmouth, NH	7	MSC	5,155	2,548	2,607
Groton, CT	Bangor, WA	7	Commercial	11,528	7,623	3,905
Norfolk, VA	Vallejo, CA	26	Commercial	34,270	29,648	4,622
Norfolk, VA	Bremerton, WA	27	Commercial	43,962	29,229	14,733
New London, CT	Bremerton, WA	30	Commercial	50,640	35,940	14,700
Groton, CT	San Diego, CA	38	MSC	56,129	43,683	12,446
		<b>147</b>		<b>\$215,651</b>	<b>\$159,117</b>	<b>\$56,534</b>

This estimate of savings is conservative because the land cost was based on a maximum of seven vehicles per car carrier. Car carriers can haul up to nine vehicles and by consolidating POVs into larger groups more favorable rates would apply.

For most of the home port changes (27 of 38), the crew or their dependents drove their POVs to the new home ports. Service members often prefer to drive their own POVs, especially if the distance between the old and new ports is relatively short, because it is easier than arranging for POV transportation. (Thirteen of the 38 moves involved distances of less than 160 miles.) In a number of instances, members drove because of the unavailability of ocean shipping, the excessively long shipping and

delivery schedules, and the greater potential of damage during ocean shipment.

Transportation officials and ships' officers often discouraged members from shipping their POVs because of transportation problems posed by the requirement that vehicles must be primarily moved by ocean vessels. For example, transportation officials encountered difficulties in arranging for the shipment of crew members' POVs from San Diego to Bremerton since no MSC ships were available and the only commercial lift from southern California would have required shipping the vehicles to Hawaii and then placing them aboard another vessel for shipment to Seattle. The traffic manager did not recommend this shipping route because of the excessive cost, the long transit time, and the potential for damage to the POVs associated with unloading and reloading them in Hawaii. In addition, this movement would have left the crew members without their POVs for about 3 to 4 weeks.

Eventually, an MSC vessel moved six POVs to Bremerton, but this resulted in the members being without their vehicles for about 3 weeks. The majority of the ship's personnel chose to drive their vehicles to Bremerton. We estimate that crew members received about \$200 for mileage and 4 days of leave to drive their POVs the 1,300 miles between San Diego and Bremerton.

Another case involving the shipment of POVs between San Diego and Bremerton in fiscal year 1983 further illustrates the problems of shipping POVs between West Coast ports. In this case, MTMC arranged to ship 57 vehicles to Hawaii by a commercial ocean carrier since no MSC ships were available. Upon arrival in Hawaii, they were loaded onto another ship for transportation to Bremerton. MTMC estimated that the transportation cost was about \$102,000, or \$72,000 more than had the vehicles been moved overland.

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## **Shipments to and From Germany**

The restriction that POVs be shipped only between customary ports increases the cost of shipping POVs to and from Germany by millions of dollars annually and leads to other problems. POVs moved to Germany are shipped to the vehicle processing center at the port of Bremerhaven, Federal Republic of Germany, which is the country's only designated customary port.

About 90 percent of the service members picking up or delivering their POVs at this port are confronted with an average round trip of about 700

miles because of the port's considerable distance from most duty stations. Service members traveling this distance to pick up or deliver their POVs are entitled to a one-way mileage expense reimbursement of \$.16 a mile and a minimum of 2 days travel time.

Over 46,000 of the 125,000 POVs MTMC shipped in fiscal year 1985 were moved through the Bremerhaven vehicle processing center. Our analysis indicates that service members shipping their POVs through Bremerhaven in fiscal year 1985 had to travel over 29 million miles, were paid about \$2.3 million for one-way mileage to the center, and were away from their duty stations over 87,000 staff days.

In previous years, the Survey and Investigations staff of the House Committee on Appropriations and the Army have recommended that POVs be shipped through a vehicle processing center located closer to service members' duty stations in Germany. In 1983, the Army recommended that a POV processing center be designated at the inland river port of Mannheim, Federal Republic of Germany. Such a center, according to the Army, would be advantageous because it would

- reduce the number of miles service members travel to pick up and deliver POVs annually;
- enhance productivity and readiness through staff-day savings resulting from reduced travel;
- reduce direct travel costs (e.g., reimbursement for picking up and delivering POVs to the processing point), and
- enhance the quality of life for members by reducing their out-of-pocket costs, reducing highway safety hazards, and making POV shipments more convenient for members and their families.

This proposal was rejected by DOD's General Counsel because Mannheim, located on the Rhine River, is not a "customary port" since ocean carriers do not operate to Mannheim.

If DOD is permitted to ship POVs through a processing center located closer to the majority of the troops in Germany, such as Mannheim, we estimate that the number of miles service members had to travel during fiscal year 1985 would have been reduced from over 29 million miles to less than 8 million miles. Allowing shipments through a more convenient location also would have reduced (1) the one-way mileage reimbursement expense in fiscal year 1985 from \$2.3 million to about \$626,000 and (2) the amount of time service members spent picking up or delivering POVs from over 87,000 staff days to about 46,000 staff days. Based

on current DOD personnel costs, we estimate the cost of travel time in fiscal year 1985 was \$10.2 million, about \$4.8 million more than if members were permitted to deliver or pick up their vehicles at a location closer to their duty stations.

We recognize that DOD will incur additional transportation costs to move the POVs between an ocean port and the inland processing center. This cost, as well as any costs involved in establishing and operating an inland processing facility, would be offset against any savings in mileage and staff-day reductions.

DOD officials told us they strongly support the concept of shipping service members' POVs from a POV processing center located closer to most members' duty stations. As previously discussed, DOD's plans to recommend to the Congress that the legislation be amended to permit an inland POV processing center in Germany, rather than restrict shipment to and from the customary port.

As mentioned earlier, studies have been made to determine the optimum POV processing point for DOD personnel stationed in Germany. However, some military and civilian officials have expressed concern about the accuracy and completeness of these studies. Assuming the law is changed, before any decision is made about establishing an inland processing point, we believe that sufficient analyses should be made to ensure that the method selected is, in fact, most advantageous to the government and to military members.

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## COHORT Unit Moves

In 1981, the Army implemented a new manning program, called the Cohesion, Operational Readiness and Training (COHORT) system, which results in the transfer of units of 60 to 800 service members at one time. The Army has experienced logistical problems in coordinating moves of COHORT units because POVs can only be shipped from customary ports

Army officials told us that their objective is to transfer these units as a group. Although each installation has developed its own approach to moving COHORT units, the installations we contacted have arranged the moves so that the service members and their families depart on a single plane, assuring that the entire unit arrives at the destination at the same time.

Between fiscal years 1982 and 1985, the Army deployed 39 COHORT units, primarily to Germany and Korea. The Army plans on deploying 18

COHORT units in fiscal year 1986 and an additional 34 units by fiscal year 1990. Initially, COHORT units were company-sized units, with 60 to 150 service members in each. However, in fiscal year 1986, the Army plans to deploy eight battalion-sized COHORT units, which will each have 560 to 800 members.

According to installation officials, the requirement that service members deliver their cars to customary ports for shipment overseas has increased the logistical problems of coordinating COHORT unit movements. For example, the commanders of COHORT units stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas, and Fort Hood, Texas, face serious logistical problems in coordinating unit moves with the shipment of POVs because the St. Louis airport, the most cost-effective airport for these COHORT unit moves, is 671 miles from New Orleans, the closest customary port. To overcome this problem, alternative transportation solutions have been devised.

Officials at Fort Riley told us they have found it difficult to insure that all COHORT unit members get on the plane unless the airport used is adjacent to the shipping port used for the vehicles. For example, in using the port of Bayonne for shipping POVs overseas, many service members missed the plane due to getting lost or otherwise delayed during the 65-mile trip from the port to the airport at McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey. As a result, they now use the port in Charleston, South Carolina, as the POV shipping point because it is close to the Charleston Air Force Base.

DOD officials told us that an alternative would be to have the service members fly out of St. Louis and have the POVs moved by car carriers to either New Orleans or an East Coast port. This would reduce the service members' travel between the base and the airport by 815 miles. However, these officials told us they could not consider this alternative because under the current law POVs can only be shipped between customary ports, not between an installation and a port.

Officials at Fort Hood are currently planning to move two battalions to Germany in June and July 1986. They estimate that each move will entail the transportation of about 560 service members, and a total of 1,200 people when the members' families are included.

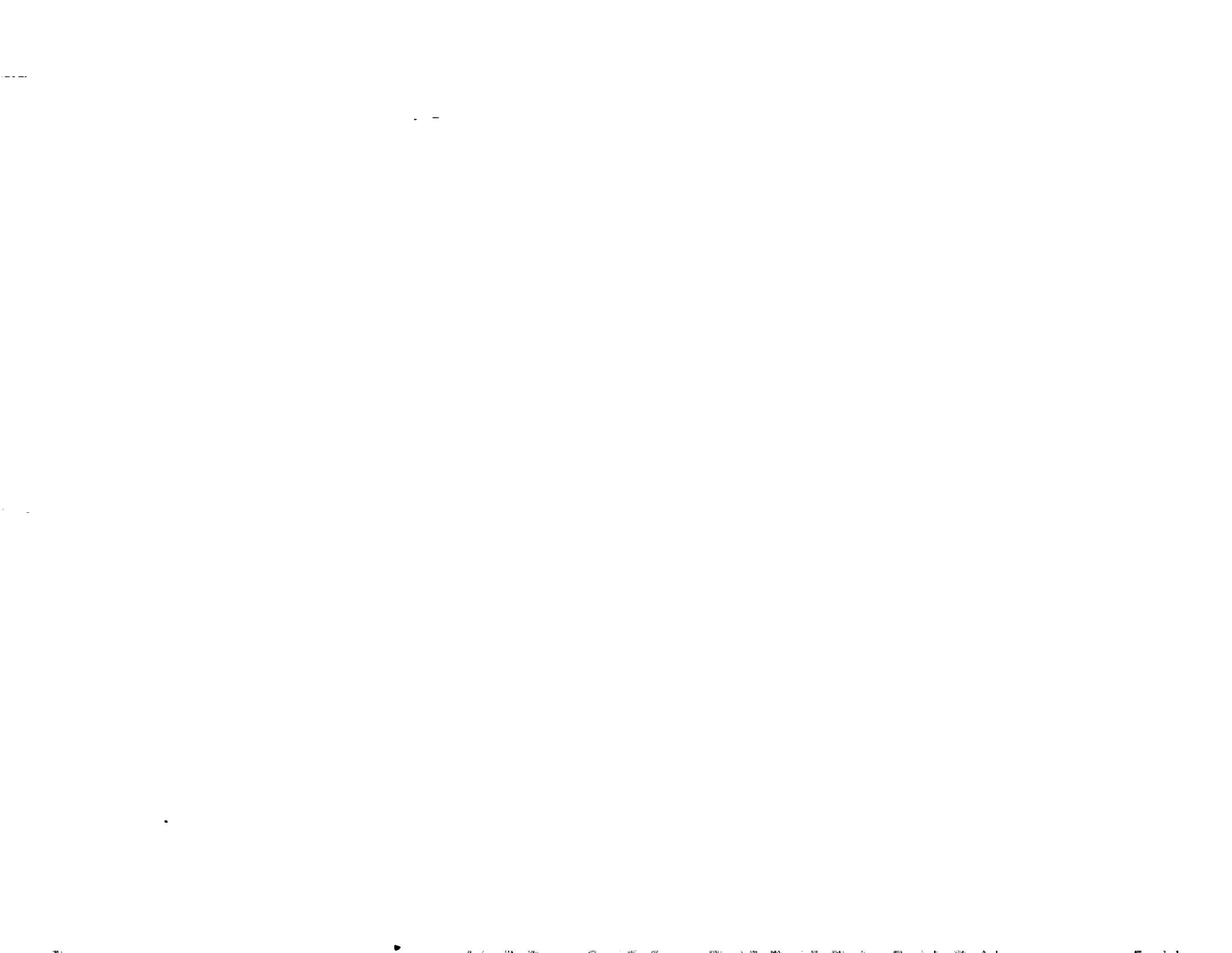
Fort Hood officials now arrange for military chartered aircraft to pick up COHORT unit members and their families at the base. However, until they recently devised a solution, the officials were concerned about the problems arising from the need to transport 260 POVs to New Orleans,

the closest customary port. One of their main concerns was that service members would be entitled to 4 days of leave to drive their vehicles to New Orleans and the absence of so many members for such a long period just prior to the unit move would increase the difficulties associated with preparing for and coordinating the move.

Fort Hood officials told us they initially sought a solution by requesting permission to move the POVs to New Orleans by truck. MTMC denied permission to ship the POVs overland because the law only permits POV shipments between customary ports. However, MTMC arranged for use of the port of Houston, instead of New Orleans, for the POV shipments. Officials now plan to have the service members convoy their vehicles to Houston, which is about 200 miles from Fort Hood, and return on a chartered bus. This plan will reduce the time COHORT unit members are away from the base to one day.

Army officials involved with COHORT unit moves stated that logistical problems caused by these moves would be significantly reduced if POVs could be trucked to customary ports from installations or if POV processing centers were located adjacent to military airfields.

We did not do a cost benefit analysis to evaluate the merits of the various POV shipping alternatives. If restrictions are eased on moving POVs overland incident to COHORT moves, we believe that such an analysis should be made to insure selection of the method which is most beneficial to the government.



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